

Somali gunmen kill two journalists

News agencies

MOGADISHU

TWO foreign journalists were shot dead in a hail of bullets by Somali gunmen outside the Italian embassy in north Mogadishu yesterday.

Italian journalist Ilaria Alpi of RAI-3 television was shot in the head and cameraman Miran Hrovatin, whose nationality could not be confirmed, was hit in the chest, witnesses said.

"They were just shot from a blue Landrover. It was not a robbery, they just wanted to kill them," said Giovanni Porzio, a friend of the victims and a correspondent for the Italian magazine *Panorama*.

Somali residents said there were rumors that the murders were over a labor dispute, but UN military spokesman Major Chris Budge said the killers wanted to steal the journalists' car.

"The bandits wanted to steal the vehicle. The journalists refused and the bandits opened fire," Budge told reporters.

He said peacekeepers in the vicinity had heard heavy small arms fire from the area of the embassy.

Hrovatin signed himself in at the al-Sahafi hotel in Mogadishu as an Italian.

Witnesses said the cameraman was sitting in the front passenger seat of the hired car and Alpi was in the back seat when they were killed.

A Somali armed guard – journalists have to hire them as protection in lawless Mogadishu – was only slightly hurt and the driver was untouched.

The victims' bodies were flown by helicopter to the Italian aircraft carrier *Garibaldi* off Mogadishu. Reporters said the bodies would be flown home today.

Italian peacekeepers left the embassy on March 10 as they withdrew from their 15-month mission to try to save Somalia from famine and clan war.

The area around the embassy has been the scene of repeated shooting incidents between gunmen and some 40 police stationed

in the building.

Five journalists, including two Reuter photographers and a cameraman with Reuters television, were killed by Somalis last July.

Many fear Somalia will slide back into clan war and banditry as US and other Western contingents pull out of the operation.

The 20,000-strong UN army left in Mogadishu has stopped trying to disarm militiamen and bandits and barely ventures out from its strongpoints.

An aging cruise liner meanwhile left Mogadishu port carrying 156 American servicemen and women in faded luxury on the first leg of their return home.

As the American withdrawal from Somalia nears its end, the *Mediterranean Sky*, which once plied tourist routes between Greece and Italy, sailed under lease to the US government for the last time.

Another 68 soldiers left by air for Dover Air Force Base, Del., crammed among cargo aboard a C-5A Galaxy, one of a fleet of the giant planes that has been removing troops and materiel since January.

The rest of the 1,500 US troops in Somalia will leave next week. Their commander, Maj. Gen. Thomas R. Montgomery, left Friday.

Also drawing to a close is the participation in the UN mission by a number of other Western countries. The last German troops left Somalia on Friday, and 440 remaining Italians will be gone by tomorrow.

The remaining UN force will be made up of about 19,000 mostly Asian and African troops.

The Italians and Germans left behind tons of food and equipment for use by UN and private aid agencies, but Somali looters swarmed over the surplus stockpiles almost as soon as the troops left their camps. Reporters also saw Egyptian UN peacekeepers carting away some of the booty.